HOW NORWEGIAN PEASANTS EARN A LIVING.

By SIR HERBERT MAXWELL, BART., M. P.

Take a Scottish small farmer or farm laborer, not a Highland Celt, but one from any of the English-speaking seaboard districts—Orkney or Caithness, the east coast from Helmsdale to Berwick, the shores of Solway, or where you will—invest him with singular suavity of expression and courtesy of manner, deprive him of the means of access to spirituous liquors until his stomach recoils from the very suggestion of any stimulant stronger than the lightest beer, and you will produce something indistinguishable, till he begins to speak, from the typical Norseman of the fjords and dals. Of a population of about two millions, three-quarters or thereby earn their living from the soil or from the sea, oftenest by a combination of both, for the towns of Norway all told do not contain more than 500,000 inhabitants.

Grave, resourceful, dignified, thrifty, darling, temperate, the Norse peasantry hold a high place among the children of men. Nowhere need the advocate of compulsory temperance search for more convincing argument in support of total prohibition than he shall find in Norway. Formerly, those tell us who remember the country a generation ago, there was no more drunken nation on the face of the earth than the Norse; at the present day the people do not drink, for the same and simple reason that cherubs can't sit down—they have not the wherewithal. A modified Gothenburg system has stamped out the vice by removing the temptation, or, at least, made it well nigh impossible to gratify the craving; and with the vice has disappeared most of those ugly blots which mar and impede civilization in other lands. Wives are not battered to death; horses have nothing to fear from the lash; poverty remains, it is true, but it is not embittered by close proximity to excessive luxury. The whole rural population—three parts of the community—is poor; but their poverty has not its source in the public house; it is that noble poverty which conceives but simple wants, and gratifies them by wringing subsistence out of a physical environment that would overcome any except a dauntless race. So the poor man holds his head as high as his richer neighbor, who salutes the other as punctiliously as he does the English millionaire who rents the salmon fishing, and is a source of such profit to the owner of carrioles.

POVERTY—NOT SQUALOR.

It is seldom, also, in Norway that poverty, even when extreme, assumes the complexion of squalor. Bellies may be empty and backs but poorly clad, yet the house that shelters both generally has a trim, cheerful appearance, owing to material whereof it is built, and that which furnishes fuel for the hearth. The abundance of wood and the absence of coal, with its concomitant grime, tend to keep the aspect bright without and fragrant within. Wooden walls, resting on a stone foundation, is the uniform plan for houses great and small, and a lick of paint from time to time keeps these weather-tight and cheerful to the eye. Wood is an excellent non-conductor, and as there is no stint of fuel, these houses are warm in winter. But they are noisy dwellings; every footfall resounds through them. Rising at 5 this morning, stealthily, so as not to disturb the sleeping household, I was painfully aware that, in stamping into my fishing boots, I sent a reverberation from end to end of the whole structure. Red-tiled roofs are the rule near towns and harbors, especially in the south; but toward the north, wooden shingles are generally used, which sometimes get a coat of red paint, at other times are left bare, to assume lovely tones from bleaching in the sun. The humbler dwellings are sometimes roofed with turf, which becomes a perfect parterre of delicate brilliant flowers. Yesterday, half way up the Suldal, I saw a truly exquisite roof garden. A deep growth of moss, varying from the rich russet to the intense green, was half veiled by a purple mist of blossom, spangled with gold. The sun being behind the house, I was puzzled at first to identify the flowers, which had the appearance of raised embroidery upon dark velvet. Nearer inspection showed them to be those of a small wild pansy and scattered plants of yellow hawkweed. One is accustomed to wonder at the elaborate and ingenious combinations in the flower beds of London parks, but here was haphazard loveliness on the roof of this lowly mountain cot, surpassing the costliest efforts of the gardeners' craft. Perhaps it is in the profusion and beauty of their wild flowers that is to be found the reason for the general neglect of horticulture by the Norse peasant farmers. It is the rarest thing possible to see any attempt at decorative gardening, even round the houses of the wealthier farmers. In the cemeteries, it is true, it is the custom to plant flowers, perhaps in traditional symbolism of the resurrection; but nothing of the kind is done near the homestead. Then, all through the summer the woods are full of small fruits—blaeberries, bilberries, cowberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries; higher up the hills you may fill your biggest baskets with the most delicious of all, the orange cloudberry; and therefore it is that nobody follows the example sometimes set by the parson of the parish, in growing cherries, plums and gooseberries. The utmost that is done is to plant a few apple trees; and these, at this present time of writing, are weighed down with ruddy fruit. Fruit farming is perhaps a trifle overdone everywhere at present; but certainly the favorable climate, the extraordinary abundance of fruit produce under the prolonged sunshine of summer days and the facilities for transport offered by the frequent steamer service in the fjords suggest that the Norsemen might derive their share of profit from the industry.

Leaving matter-of-might-be for matter-of-fact, it must be owned that the resources of the country are no more than to suffice the existing population, which has remained almost at the same figure, slightly over two millions, for a very long time, upon a total area of 124,500 square miles. Compare this with another country which has many features in common with Norway, but without the important one of a seaboard. Switzerland maintains a population of 3,000,000 upon a total area of 15,469 square miles. Deprive it of the harvest of sea and rivers and Norway would in truth be a poor country. As it is, the nation of Norsemen increases, but the stationary population is kept within the limits of subsistence by emigration. As much as one-sixteenth of the inhabitants have been known to emigrate in a single year. For those who remain at home the life is a hard but healthy one; and the traveler through the land becomes aware of little or no discontent.

STRANGE HARVESTINGS.

As may be imagined in a country whereof one-third lies within the Arctic circle, with nearly 3 per cent. of its total area under glaciers or perpetual snow, agriculture is an industry more precarious than even in the British isles. Not more than 2 per cent. of the face of the country can be reckoned arable, although there is a large extent of land affording good pasture, or producing natural hay. Accordingly, except in the lower Ostland or Sondenfjeldske, where the natural features are least prohibitive of husbandry, Norwegian agriculture is of a somewhat sketchy character. Nothing is vital but the hay harvest, for if that were to fail, there is nothing to keep the cattle and sheep alive during the long, dark and terribly rigorous winter. So at the end of June the whole population is astir; rows of mowers pursue their rhythmical toil in the meadows, men and girls turn the math, and the glorious sunshine, enduring at midsummer for twenty hours out of the twenty-four, do the rest. The hay ripens "while you wait." This is the only season at which Norsemen seem to be in a hurry. "There is no use for haste," runs their proverb, "except in catching fleas." Once the main hay crop is secured in the roomy wooden barns, the stress of work is past; but there still remains enough to occupy the days. The riverside meadows have yielded their spoil, but the woodland glades and mountain lawns remain to be shaven, and this is done with scrupulous and minute diligence. By means of miniature scythes every green thing is shorn close, and, where the sun comes not readily, is hung on what resembles a gigantic towel horse, to be converted into what passes for hay. I have seen swathes containing less of grass than lily-of-the-valley leaves; sprays of birch, ash and rowan also serve their turn, cut and dried, to be mumbled in the dark of winter by the patient live stock. Even potato tops are carefully garnered for the same purpose; and, inasmuch as these are not full grown till early autumn when there is less sunshine, they require special care in preparation.

Primitive methods of culture suffice for the patches of potato, oats and rye which constitute the entire arable effort on most of the farms. One seldom sees a rich "midden" or dungstead, such as is the glory of a Scottish steading; and although much of the land under cultivation, often composed of merely granite sand and therefore naturally poor, shows signs of extreme exhaustion, the owners generally seem indifferent to the virtues of manure. Hence some of the oat fields contain as much poppy as corn. I could not but smile yesterday as I beheld the operations of a farmer-proprietor of more advanced views. His was a good and substantial house, a fine veranda along the sunny front, and a broad expanse of meadow land stretching away to the Logen river. He sat in his veranda in a wide-brimmed straw hat, watching two lads who were maneuvering a cart in the meadow. In the cart was a tank, and a chance flow of wind wafted that to my nostrils which left me in no doubt as to what was in that tank. It was liquid manure of the most concentrated and overpowering aroma. So far so good, from an agricultural point of view; the comic part was in the application of this fluid gold. The two lads each plied a utensil like a rather large breakfast cup, holding about an imperial pint, which they plunged into the tank, regardless of the appalling stench, immersing their arms to the elbows and then scattered the contents on the grass. It seemed never to have occurred either to them or their employer (who was no doubt their father) how much labor might have been saved by using a larged vessel, attached to a long handle, and how much more economically the manure might have been applied in spring, instead of just as all growth was about to be stopped by the winter's snow.

The corn harvest is of infinitely less moment than the hay crop to farmers, small and large; but it is not less elaborate and picturesque, because, although the grain may be poorly ripened and of indifferent quality, the straw grows long and rank in the heat and moisture of sheltered valleys and it is of high value as winter fodder. Generally it is battered and twisted into an apparently hopeless condition by the August rains before it is nearly ready for the sickle; but the area under corn is seldom considerable, and long practice has made the husbandman skillful in reaping oats and rye under the most adverse conditions. So far the operations have differed not at all from what may be witnessed on any Highland croft; now comes the picturesque feature which distinguishes the true Northlander harvest. Birches, or young pines, ten or twelve feet high, having been felled in readiness, all the branches are lopped off except those on one side, which are left as pegs about six inches long. Then these poles are set up and the sheaves are hung on the pegs, so that the little field assumes the aspect of a grove of golden columns at fair intervals. It is a method both practical and scientific, for the grain is kept off the wet soil and the sheaves are exposed to every breath of air and every ray of sunshine, but it would not serve the Scotland farmer's turn by reason of the scarcity of wood in his country and the superfluity of wind.

The mention of wood brings us to a notable feature of rural life in Norway. Every farmer owns the land he tills, and always a good deal more that he doesn't till—uncultivable forest, to wit, whereon he relies to supply him with building material, with fuel, and often the main part of his income by sales to the wood merchant. Economically the system is a disastrous one. Every owner cuts and carves his own portion of the great forest according to his fancy, without any obligation to provide or to protect young growth. Anything marketable may be felled and sent down the river to the sawmill or the shipper at the mouth. The great bulk of what is so disposed of consists of Scots pine of forty or fifty years' growth—almost the most valuable timber that could be grown; for pine timber is not mature under from seventy to one hundred years of age. The pine sows itself profusely; there is no ground game except in "lemming years" to interfere with its growth; but with the young pines springs up a dense crop of birch and alder, which are often allowed to overshadow and destroy the young pines. In many fine dals, therefore, the pines have well-nigh disappeared, and the mountain sides bear nothing but birch and alder, which, however beautiful to the eye in summer, are fit only for firing. Obviously a source of material wealth to individuals—immense in the aggregate—is herein neglected. Co-operation between proprietors and the application of sound principles of forestry would increase incalculably the value of this vast extent of natural forest, and it is difficult to estimate the return that might be secured from a few hundredweights of larch seed sown on a mountain side; for larch timber is not only of far earlier market value, but when mature produces superior timber to the native Scots pine.

WINTER LIFE IN NORWAY.

So much for the summer life of the men of the fjords and dales, but how many of the irresponsible tourists and sportsmen who witness it in the sweet o' the year are at pains to realize what it is in winter? Take a typical valley such as the Romsdal. During the summer months it teems with active, healthful toil such as I have endeavored to describe. On the north the range which culminates in the impressive Romsdalhorn is cleft by a mighty gorge. Facing the Horn, at the distance of only a few hundred yards, rise the weird Troldtinder, forming the other wall of the gorge, the height of these opposing masses being 6,000 feet, nearly sheer from crest to base. Between these stupendous cliff curtains rolls the mighty Rauma, with here and there a narrow selvage of meadow and corn land. Here, even at midsummer, when it is never dark, the face of the sun can only be seen as he passes over from one side of the gorge to the other, between the hours of 10 a. m. and 4 p. m. How must it be in winter, when the dwellers in that dread valley behold neither sun nor moon for three whole months? From noon to noon the stars shine down upon that solitude; lights glimmer from houses three parts buried in snow; silence reigns supreme, for the summer cascades have been smitten into pillars of ice; the great river itself lies paralyzed in fetters of frost. Only from time to time the dark vale resounds to the thunder of an avalanche, or the awful crash of a frost-rent pinnacle of rock. No post, no newspapers; no marketing or junketings, such as enlivened the summer days and nights for the dwellers in that dale. The fancy of most of us recoils shuddering from such a dreary experience. Yet such is the life of these cheerful, patient people; and it may be that none except those who pass through winters such as these can fully understand the ecstacy of returning spring.

Many of the men avoid the tedium of compulsory idleness in winter by going off to the North sea fishery. A large proportion of the male population are afloat at all times, for there are no more excellent seamen than the Norse. The United States navy is largely manned from among them. Their splendid daring and steadiness at sea is the one trait by which we recognize the Viking of old in the Northlander of today. In all else—in their gentleness, patience, courtesy, industry and temperance—they seem to present the very antithesis to those terrible pirates who swarmed across the North sea in their black kyuls—they and their cousins the Danes—laid heavy tribute upon all our coasts, held a great part of our land in thrall for three centuries, and left behind them memories of cruelty and rapine darker than anything else in our history. Yet there is scarcely any nation of Europe which has kept so pure in race as the Norse; for theirs is not a land either to brook invasion or invite immigration. It is a breeding ground for heroes and hardy colonists; those who stay at home are perhaps the most contented community on earth; those who go forth to settle in other lands take with them that habit of thrift and homely austerity of life which sets a man far on the road to welfare.

Next Week—"The Sorrows of a Sultan's Subjects," by A. J. Dawson.

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John T. Johnson, member of the 1893 Minnesota Legislature, was killed at Starbuck, Minn., Friday night by a runaway team.

BEAUTIES AND SKELETONS

In the Royal Family at the Court in Berlin.

Brooklyn Eagle.

Berlin has its noted court beauties. The sisters of the Kaiser are fair types of the Teuton Beauty. The Arch Princessin of Saxon Meiningen and Princessin Friedrich Karl von Hessen, both sisters of the Kaiser, are among the favorites at court. One of the most brilliant women of the Prussian court is Princess Friedrich Leopold, of Prussia, who is a sister of the Kaiserin, and comes from the old feudal Schleswig-Holstein house. Among other celebrities are Princess Karl Anton von Hohenzollern, born in Belgium, who lives in Potsdam and is attached to the Kaiserin's suite. Among the younger set is the pretty, bright Princessin Pauline of Wurttemberg, a daughter of the King of Wurttemberg and Arch Princess of Wied, who also resides near the royal palace in Potsdam.

The Berlin court also has its skeleton closet, its bitter family feuds and griefs, which are kept sealed from the profane public eye. But the Kaiser is no friend of secret court intrigues or scandals and makes short work of such domestic difficulties. Frequently it is asserted that there is a coolnes between the Kaiser and his eldest brother, Prince Henry, and that the latter has been commissioned for sea duty so that he may be kept distant. This is untrue, as the strongest brotherly affection exists between the two. The Kaiser rules over family affairs as over the empire with an iron will. Under Bismarck the various widely-spread branches of the Hohenzollern family and reigning Prussian princes were rent with jealousies and family rows regarding prestige and incomes. But the Kaiser has swept aside these cobwebs and there is perhaps no European court where the "whole family" is more harmonious and free from the customary ills of nobility than the German court.

Evidence of Unfairness.

Boston Advertiser.

Now, if John Mitchell has no opportunity to cross-examine President Baer, there will be a manifest unfairness in the proceedings of the high court of coal strike arbitration.